DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 152 068 FL 009 289

AUTHOR von Raffler-Engel, Walburga; Hasham, Brenda Hopson
TITLE Homophonous Self Primers and Back Channel Elicitors.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the World Congress of Phoneticians (3rd, Tokyo, Japan, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Youth; Body Language; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Discourse Analysis; Intonation; Language Research; *Nonverbal Communication; *Paralinguistics; Phonological Units; Phonology; *Speech Communication; Stress (Phonology); *Suprasegmentals; Videotape Recordings
IDENTIFIERS *Fillers (Phonology); *Kinesics; Turn Taking

ABSTRACT

Linguistic research has paid little attention to "fillers." These so-called "hesitation forms" can be classified as being either "buffers" or "back channel elicitors," the former being self-primers, and the latter being other-directed. These forms are difficult to distinguish without access to kinesic and paralinguistic information. A pilot study was conducted to observe the type of adjustment the hearer makes to different types of fillers. Thirty-six subjects from 3 to 18 years of age, all Black Americans, were videotaped and observed in various conversational actions. Observation indicated that buffers and back channel elicitors were clearly distinguished by the hearers. In addition, it was demonstrated that the identical verbalization might appear as buffer or elicitor and that this distinction on the part of the hearer was made possible by a combined interpretation of verbal and nonverbal signs. A transcript of one videotaped interaction is appended. (AM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED152068

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Walburga von Raffler-Engel

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Walburga von Raffler-Engel and Brenda Hopson Hasham
(Vanderbilt University, U.S.A.)

Homophonous self primers and back channel elicitors

Proceedings of the IIId World Congress of Phoneticians,

Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan, 1976

ed. by Nasao Onishi

Little, if any attention has been devoted to fillers by linguists. For the structuralists, hesitation sounds such as uh and ah and other interruptions of the normal flow of speech were of limited interest. Research into these forms was largely due to the fact that the phonetic composition of these sounds is language-specific and that the most frequent of these sounds most likely represents the sound closest to the base of articulation. The classic example is eh eh (ə ə) for American English. Hesitation words such as well, and you know were of interest almost solely for their intonation contours.

Linguists of the transformational school, at best, considered the phenomenon marginal because of their exclusive concern for well-formed sentences, and because their primary interest was not in spontaneous speech manifestations.

The psychologists, primarily Goldman-Eisler (1968) and those that followed her pioneering work of the early fifties, researched fillers because of their interest in pause.

It is only recently that the phenomenon has come fully into its own due to the growing awareness that language manifests itself mostly in inter-personal communication, and that communication is multi-channel (Birdwhistell 1970). It became apparent that some verbalizations have gestural counterparts. Eventually, the

FL009289

accuracy, and consequently the scientific value, of interpretations based solely on oral transcription of a speech event was called into question. The plui-modal communicative approach to language acquisition (von Raffler-Engel 1975, 1976) challenged any theoretical conclusions drawn from a linguistic analysis which does not include visual factors alongside the auditory factors. This approach also requires that any linguistic theory be induced from empirical evidence inclusive of cultural presuppositions.

Among the researchers in the non-verbal spects of human communication, Duncan (975), Ekman and Friesen (1972), and Wieman and Knapp (1975) have been most effective in clarifying the function of the so-called hesitation forms.

Ekman and Friesen are mainly concerned with the categorization of gestures. Hesitation forms could be classified within their non-verbal category of illustrators. Illustrators fulfill a double function; the speaker primes himself as well as his hearer. Ekman and Friesen (p.361) posit that "Illustrators are socially learned, presumably many of them early in life during language acquisition. Their chief function early in life is probably to command the adult's attention, and to aid in explaining matters for which the child has no words." Later, illustrators serve to help the speaker to maintain the role of speaker by renewing attention or indicating that he or she is not finished speaking. In this way illustrator behavior is closely related to the back channel behavior of the hearer.

The term back channel is a creation of Victor Yngve (1970). The phenomenon was researched extensively by Starkey Duncan. Duncan considers the process by which interactants exchange speaking turns as one of the most salient aspects of face-to-face interaction. He (p. 202) proposes a series of "discrete signals and accompanying rules...with respect to the exchange of speaking turns". Of relevance to this paper

are the following:

1. Speaker-turn signal: a permissive signal that indicates to the hearer that he or she may claim the turn; composed of six behavioral cues that may be found in intonation, content, syntax, paralanguage, and body motion.

2. Speaker-gesticulation signals: negates turn signal that is concurrently displayed with it. For example, the speaker completes a sentence (a turn signal) but continues gesticulating with the hand to indicate that the speaker-turn continues.

3. Speaker-state signal: marks participant's shift form hearer to speaker state. Duncan describes these in relation to turning the head towards the hearer and initiation of gesticulation.

4. Auditor back-channel signal: Duncan found the following signals or kinesic cues to be related to the hearer's back channeling.

A. M-Hm. Verbalized signal.

B. Sentence completion.

C. Requests for clarification.

D. Brief restatements.

E. Head nods and shakes.

In a pilot study we observed the back-channeling and illustrator behavior of young Black Americans in order to ascertain the type of adjustment the hearer makes to different types of fillers. Thirty-six subjects ranging in age from three to eighteen years at WTVF Channel 5 television studio in Nashville, Tennessee. Subjects came from various urban backgrounds, mostly middle and working class. Subjects were given a tour of the studio in order to become familiarized with the setting, but remained in a waiting room before taping, and were taken to another room for snacks after taping. Interactants were randomly mixed and grouped according to age, sex,

sibling status, and socio-economic status. Most subjects appeared in three situations: as hearer to an adult female speaker, as speaker to a child hearer, and as a hearer to a child speaker. In addition several regular conversational actions were also filmed. The subjects were told to listen to a story told to them by the adult and which he or she was to retell to another child. No actual specification as to the child's performance with regard to length of the story or specificity of detail in recounting the story was made. Our observations were made from the videotapes. Constraints were realized by the formal setting and the child's understanding (or orders from the parents) as to what a story-telling situation requires. It was assumed that the children had all participated in story-telling situations and had been socialized or were in the process of being socialized to conform to the implicit rules of the story-telling situation either at home or at school.

For the purpose of this particular study we concentrated our attention on the verbalized signals of Duncan's type 4.A. The complete transcription of one interaction is appended.

By analysing the listening behavior of our young subjects Ms. Hopson-Hasham and myself were able to observe from their reactions that they clearly distinguished the fillers which were meant for them from the fillers which were self-directed, actual hesitation forms.

The latter, termed buffers by Knapp (1972) are hesitation forms, sounds or short words or word phrases, used by the speaker for self-priming or to gain time to think. The former, the other-directed villers, we termed back channel elicitors.

On the phonological (exclusive of paralanguage) and grammatical level, these are frequently undistinguishable from buffers but the accompanying non-verbal behavior is different, and they obviously differ on the semantic level. Sometimes

these signals used by the speaker to elicit response from the hearer, are not verbalized at all, but expressed in purely non-verbal signals.

Buffers and back-channel elicitors are very difficult, if not downright impossible, to distinguish if one does not have access to the kinesic and paralinguistic information given along with the verbalization. Transcripts from audio tapes generally make no distinction between the two, classifying them in identical manner as fillers, or hesitation forms. Only with the use of video tape, or film for that matter, can they be clearly distinguished and thus classified separately. Any transcription that wants to be representative of the actual message should include provisions for marking non-verbal cues. Concerning the paralinguistic cues, it is not sufficient to mark pitch and stress, one also needs to mark empo, phonation ratio, and other features which require a separate paper to be properly treated. The whole concept of paralanguage may be a misnomer. The features grouped under that heading likely turn out to be an integral part of language as the meaning is not fully conveyed without them. Linguists probably have not yet analysed them adequately enough to incorporate them into the phonological level.

The first researchers to elaborate on the distinction between the two categories of fillers were Wieman and Knapp (1975): "Speakers seemed to emit buffers in attempts either to hold the floor while planning their next statements or to elicit feedback from the auditor without yielding the floor (i.e. eliciting head nods or reinforcers for continuing to talk)". The findings by Wieman and Knapp parallel our findings and, as we proceeded in our research we were happy to see their article.

Kinesics has entered the field of linguistics only recently and, as transformational-generative grammar gives way to a more meaning-oriented interpretation of language, it is hoped that the plui-modal communicative approach will prevail in linguistic analysis.

Traditionally, linguists distinguish between filled pauses and empty pauses. Filled pauses are interruptions of the regular flow of the sentence, or sentence sequence that makes up a discourse, filled with hesitation forms, while empty pauses are silent interruptions. From a semantic standpoint this classification is erroneous. Filled pauses could be "filled" equally with a verbalized signal which may or may not be accompanied by a gesture, or they may be "filled" by a gesture only. Empty pauses would then be pauses that do not contain either a verbal nor a kinesic sign. Silent pauses would be pauses filled with a gesture, and filled pauses would be pauses filled with a verbalization. Semantically, of course, even empty pauses carry a meaning (von Raffler-Engel 1972). Very frequently a protracted silence serves to highlight the importance of the statement to follow. The pause is part of the message. Graphically, such preceding silence is frequently signalled by underlining the statement to be emphasized.

In our videotape study of listening behavior we found that verbalization, such as you know or right, might appear in either the buffer or back channel elicitor category depending on paralinguistic manifestation or kinesic behavior during its occurence. It was clearly evidenced that full identification of the correct function of these fillers resulted from the combined interpretation of the verbal and the non-verbal signals. Interactants were usually aware of the distinctions made in paralanguage and/or kinesics. A hearer will not respond to a buffer but will respond to an elicitor. The same hesitation phrase you know when uttered with paralinguistic and kinesic signs indicating that it is a within-turn signal, a time stall for the speaker, does not elicit a back-channel response. Whereas you know uttered with a rise in pitch and increased stress and possibly accompanied by movements of the speaker towards the hearer, will elicit a response.

In some instances when responses were elicited and not received the speaker responded to herself:

"Right?" Looking at hearer who does not respond: "Right." Humour is frequently based on the absence of an expected reaction in favor of an unexpected one. Children may misunderstand a cue but in our study it appears more likely that the child preferred not to give the expected response in order to tease, and eventually, confuse the adult.

The following transcript from a video taped session between Ms. Hopson-Hasham and an eight year old boy (Calvin), who is intel'ectually more mature than his chronological age and his physical appearance would predict, will document what I said above. The videotape portion can be made available upon request.

Buffers are underlined once.
Elicitors are underlined twice.

Speaker (Brenda)	Intonation and duration	Hearer (Calvin)
Well, you know there was this lady	Level	no reaction
...who used to tell this little boy Lee Edwards stories, right?	Rising	nods his head
She'd reach out into the air you know and grab	Rising	nods and turns to face Brenda
...and along came this tumbleweed family, I think it was 32 tumbleweeds	Extra short	reacting all along. Opening his eyes wide, moving his head forward--says hmm.
They were going toward the north and and		no reaction
And, you know, he didn't mind a little trouble.	Level	no reaction
...nobody to talk to or anything	Rising	nods his head
And, you know, that by this time...	Extra Long Slight Rise	Opens eyes wide Tilts head forward Then turns to face B.
And he said "Wow!", you know and he said...	Falling	no reaction

Speaker (Brenda)	Intonation and duration	Hearer (Calvin)
there wasn't any earthquake or anything	Rising	Makes a half circle with a motion of his head. Has a puzzling look on his face.
And so, and eh Johdu was running along		no reaction
...had a big barrel on the end of it, right?	Rising	continues nodding as he was doing throughout this phrase
...and so, eh and so, so Johdu got curious		no reaction
And he thought he had caught him, you know and had tricked him	Extra Short	no reaction
And so, eh, so Johdu...		no reaction
and and donkeys and cows...		no reaction
till they all fell asleep, right?	Rising	nods his head
He wanted them to get, eh, some fresh air		no reaction
Then he, you know, went back to whatever he was doing	Extra Short	no reaction
And finally when the giant came, you know to get all the people back in the barrel...	Rising	nods his head after 'barrel'

Transcript prepared by Judy Ron

REFERENCES

Birdwistell, Ray. 1970. Kinesics and context; essays on body motions. Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Duncan, Starkey Jr. 1975. "Interaction units during speaking turns in dyadic face-to-face conversations," Organization of behavior in face-to-face interaction, Adam Kendon et al. eds. The Hague: Mouton.

Ekman, Paul and Wallace V. Friesen. 1972. "Hand movement". Journal of Communication 22, p. 353-374.

Goldman-Eilser, Frieda. 1968. Psycholinguistics: Experiments in spontaneous speech. London: Academic Press.

Knapp, Mark L. 1972. Non-verbal behavior. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

von Raffler-Engel, Walburga. 1972. "Some phono-stylistic elements of Black English", Phonetica 25, p. 53-64.

----------. 1975. "A pluri-modal communicative approach to language acquisition", Baby Talk and Infant Speech (Proceedings of the International Symposium on First Language Acquisition, Florence, Italy, 1972), W. von Raffler-Engel and Y. Lebrun, eds., Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlinger (Neurolinguistics 5), p. 287-289.

----------. 1978. "The pluri-modal approach to language acquisition", Proceedings of the First I.C.U. Symposium on Pedolinguistics, Tokyo, Japan, 1976, Fred C.C. Peng, ed., Hiroshima, Japan: Bunka Hyoron-sha Publishers.

Wieman, John and Mark L. Knapp. 1975. "Turn taking in conversations", Journal of Communication, Spring, p. 75-92.

Yngve, Victor. 1970. "On getting a word in edgewise", Papers from the Sixth Regional Meeting, Chicago Linguistic Society, Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Linguistic Society, p. 567-577.